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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes findings from a national survey of 1,902 teachers of preschoolers regarding the extent to which they are able to engage in the educational practices they endorse. Teachers were given a list of 21 practices and asked to rate the extent to which each practice happened in their classroom and the extent to which they would want the practice to occur in a "perfect world." Findings indicate few discrepancies between reported practices and beliefs. There were significant differences in the extent to which teachers from various types of programs endorsed group-centered beliefs, that is, those that encourage all children to engage in the same activities at the same time and at the same pace. Teachers in public schools, Head Start centers, and other non-profit centers endorsed group-centered beliefs significantly less than teachers in religiously affiliated or for-profit settings. Teachers with more education endorsed group-centered beliefs less than those with less education. Teachers uniformly agreed that reading, math, science, and music activities should take place daily. All barriers to endorsed practices were given relatively low ratings. The report concludes that early childhood teachers largely see themselves as engaging in the practices that they endorse and that attention should be paid to changing teachers' knowledge and values to achieve child-centered practices. (KB)

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NCEDL Spotlights

No. 10 May 1999

A Survey: Quality Practices

Excerpts from "Quality Practices and Barriers in Early Childhood Settings: A National Survey," a paper presented in April 1999 at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Authors are Diane Early, Richard Clifford, & Carollee Howes of the National Center for Early Development & Learning.

Preschool teachers report engaging in practices they endorse

A national survey of 1,902 teachers of preschoolers reveals that teachers report that they are able, generally, to engage in the practices they endorse. Teachers were given a list of twenty-one practices and asked to rate to what extent a practice happened in their classroom and to what extent they would want the practice to occur "in a perfect world." Few discrepancies were found between reported practices and beliefs. Although different teachers endorsed different practices, on most items, teachers said that they are able to use the practices they endorse.

On many items teachers report almost no difference between their practices and their ideals. The four items with the smallest discrepancies between beliefs and practices are:

- All children in the group have to take part in all activities.
- Children practice skills on worksheets.
- Children are involved in group lessons.
- Children spend time playing.

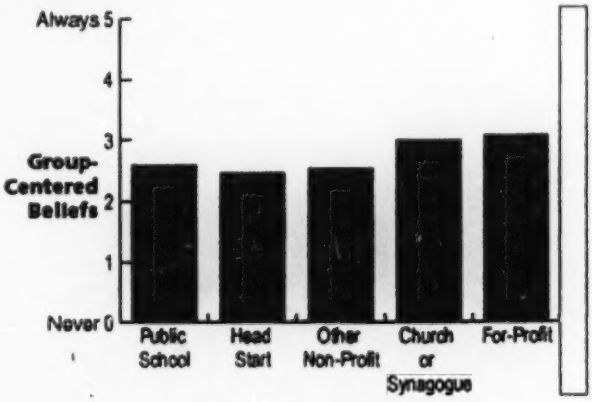
Teachers report that in a perfect world, they would engage in some practices slightly more. The four items with the largest discrepancies between beliefs and practices are:

- We have a daily science experience.
- Children have time to be alone when they want it.
- We have a daily math experience.
- We have a daily music activity.

Group-centered beliefs and demographic variables

There were significant differences found in examining which teachers endorsed group-centered beliefs based on the sponsorship of their center. Group-centered beliefs are those that encourage all children to engage in the same activities at the same time and at the same pace. It is the opposite of child-centered beliefs that encourage individualized activities and pacing. Teachers in public schools, Head Starts, and other non-porfit centers endorse group-centered beliefs significantly less than do teachers in religiously affiliated or for-profit settings. Additionally, teachers with more education endorse group-centered beliefs less.

To measure group-centered beliefs, teachers were asked a series of questions about how often they believe certain practices would take place in a perfect world. Examples include: "Children have to complete all activities," and "All children in the group have to take part in all activities."



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Barriers to Endorsed Practices

The survey asked teachers, 'How often do the following prevent fyou from teaching/caring for your group in the way you would in a perfect world?' [1=Never, 5=Always]

Children with behavior problems interfere	2.8
Lack of planning time	2.3
My group is too large	2.2
Not enough adults in the room	2.1
Parents do not support my ideas	2.0
Not enough materials	1.9
Too little pay to put in the extra effort	1.9
High turnover & teacher absences make planning difficult	1.9
I get tired and irritable because I'm worried about money	1.8

The table to the right indicates the top-rated barriers to engaging in endorsed practice. Not surprisingly, all the barriers were given relatively low ratings. Earlier, the questions about practices and beliefs indicated that teachers see themselves as employin ghte practices they endorse.

Conclusions & Implications

Early childhood teachers largely see themselves as engaging in the practies that they endorse. On avereage, they do not report many barriers to ducting their classes in the wasy they think are best—as evidenced both by the small discrepancies between their reported practices and beliefs and by the low ratings they give to the barriers listed in the survey.

Different teachers do endorse different practices, especially with regard to group-centered versus child-centered practices. although teachers uniformly agree that reading, math, science and music activities should take place daily, there is not uniform agreement with respect to beliefs about practices like involving children in group instruction and insisting that children complete all activities!

Attention should be paid to changing teachers' knowledge and values for child-centered practices. Other research has indicated that child-centered practices predict the best outcomes for children. These data indicate that teachers who endorse such practices, report being able to engage in them. However, teachers do not uniformly endorse child-centered practices. Changing teachers' knowledge and values my be a key to improving practice.

If you want more information on early childhood teachers

National Center for Early Development & Learning	**www.ncedl.org**
Center for the Child Care Workforce	**www.ccw.org**
National Child Care Information Center	**www.nccic.org**
National Association for the Education of Young Children	**www.naeyc.org**

The authors of the article on which the *Spotlight* is based are Diane Early and Richard Clifford of UNC-CH at UNC and Carollee Howes of UCLA. NCEDL is administratively housed at UNC-CH. This project is supported under the Education Research and Development Centers Program, PR/ award number R307A60004, as administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. Opinions expressed in these reports do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the National Institute on Early Childhood Development and Education (www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/), the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, or the U.S. Department of Education. Permission is granted to reprint this; we ask that you attribute the authors of the paper on which this *Spotlight* is based and the National Center for Early Development & Learning. This and other *Spotlights* may be downloaded at our web site: **www.ncedl.org**

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